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AUTHOR Derr, C. Brooklyn
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MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT: WHEN TO USE COLLABORATION, BARGAINING AND POWER APPROACHES

by

C. Brooklyn Derr

June, 1975

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This report was prepared by:

C. BROOKLYN DERR
Associate Professor of Management

Reviewed by:

DAVID A. SCHRADY, Chairman
Department of Operations Research
and Administrative Sciences

Released by:

ROBERT R. FOSSUM
Dean of Research

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by

C. Brooklyn Derr

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA - 93940

C. BROOKLYN DERR
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES
408-646-2676/2594

MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT
WHEN TO USE COLLABORATION, BARGAINING AND POWER APPROACHES

Conflicts are normal and the natural consequences of human interaction in an organizational setting. They can occur for a myriad of overt or hidden reasons. For example, an individual interacting with others on a project is upset because he feels a colleague is getting preferential treatment in relationship to himself: the internal stress he experiences causes him to subvert the normal work process, trying to gain the preferential treatment for himself, thereby setting up "conflict-problems" within the organization.

Harmony within an organization can also be destroyed by external pressures and crises that breed disagreement and tensions, causing disruptive conflicts within the enterprise. For example, in such an external crisis situation, those in position of authority can become so involved with the "life-and-death" issues and tasks of survival that they neglect to give attention to the needs of those around them. They, in turn, build up an eroding feeling of resentment and ill-will.

This article is about Conflict Management. It is aimed at conflict managers (CMs) faced with the responsibility of resolving the internal or external conflict problems confronting their own organizations that are judged to be harmful to the system and whose deletorious impact requires remedial intervention. The first step is the formulation of a Contingency Theory for managing the particular

conflicts eroding the enterprises in order for the CM to have a conceptual framework for knowing what action to take and when.

CONTINGENCY THEORY

In order to understand the framework in which the Contingency Theory operates, it is necessary to define the methods normally applied to the understanding and handling of conflicts:

(1)	Conflict Studies:	A non-dynamic approach where the scholar seeks only to understand
(2)	Conflict Resolution:	An attempt to solve the problem once and for all
(3)	Conflict Management:	A dynamic, ongoing approach where a CM recognizes problems and acts to use the energy they generate to improve the organization

The Conflict Manager accepts conflicts as normal and natural events and is prepared not only to take the necessary action to resolve the disputes, but to harness the energy generated by these conflicts. By such action he will improve the organization as well as the individuals.

The causes of conflicts are innumerable and managing them is a complex process calling for a variety of interrelated and integrated approaches. Thus, a conflict management theory contingent upon the situation is required.

Organizational theorists in the early and mid-1960's focused on the impact of tasks and the external environment on the enterprise.[1]

Their work emphasized that there is no "best" way to design the organization's structure, "since appropriate structure is contingent upon the variations in both task and environment, as well as the needs of individuals and groups within the organization."[2] These studies have led to a body of literature called Contingency Theory. As Thomas and Bennis put it,

> "An effective paradigm incorporates what might be termed a 'situational' or 'contingency' framework, a point of view reflected in much of the current theoretical and empirical work in organizational theory. There is a primary emphasis upon diagnosis and the assumption that it is self-defeating to adopt a 'universally' applicable set of principles and guidelines for effecting change or managing conflict."[3]

Accordingly, it is proposed herein that the appropriate conflict management mode is contingent upon a diagnosis of the causes and the existence of certain preconditions, from which a Contingency Theory of Conflict Management is established.

There are three major Conflict Management approaches from which a manager can draw to formulate a Contingency Theory appropriate to the problems and disputes disrupting an organization: Collaboration, Bargaining and Power-play. While none of these is appropriate for every situation, neither is any one used without consequence. One strategy might be best for organizational improvement, while another (albeit appropriate) may cause the most problems for the enterprise. The objective is to be guided by a normative theory of organizational

effectiveness and to use it whenever possible; however, where the diagnosis of the problems reveals that the normative position will not "cure" them, the Conflict Manager should design a Contingency Theory strategy somewhere between the idealistic (normative) and realistic (one of the three Conflict Management approaches).

If the organization in which the various units and people are conflicting has a healthy mix of tasks, environmental conditions, internal structures and procedures, human and other resources, the Conflict Manager might opt for a mixed strategy between two or more of the management approaches to solve the dilemma.

THREE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT MODES: PREFERENTIAL CONTINGENCIES

Collaborative: This theory maintains that people should surface their differences (get them out in the open) and then work on the problems until they have attained mutually satisfactory solutions. This approach assumes that people will be motivated to expend the time and energy for such problem-solving activity. It tries to exploit the possible mutual gains of the parties in the dispute and views the conflict as a creative force pushing them to achieve an improved state of affairs to which both sides are fully committed.

Bargaining: This mode for managing conflicts assumes that neither party will emerge satisfied from the confrontation but that both, through negotiation, can get something they do not have at the start, or more of something they need, usually by giving up

something of lesser importance. One party generally wins more than the other; by the skillful use of tactical trades, he can get the maximum possible from the other side. Sometimes the tactics used in trading are underhanded and create bad feelings. In the end, when an agreement is reached, it is usually enforced by a written contract with sanctions in case of non-compliance. In the event no agreement is reached, a third-party mediator may be employed to bind the sides to eventual arbitration.

Power-play: This mode differs from the other two approaches because its emphasis is on self-interest. Whereas, in collaboration and bargaining the two sides come together to try and resolve their problems, when power is the dominant mode, the actions are unilateral or in coalitions acting unilaterally. All of the power technician's resources are unleashed against his opponent to win on a given issue or a long-range program. He gives neither internal commitment nor does he agree to external sanctions guaranteeing compliance to joint decisions.

Collaboration is the most preferred strategy for the good of the enterprise because: (1) it promotes authentic interpersonal relations; (2) it is a creative force for innovation and improvement; (3) it enhances feedback and information flow, and (4) it has a way of ameliorating the climate of the organization so that there is more openness, trust, risk-taking and good feelings of integrity.[4]

Bargaining is the second most preferred alternative. It is an approach that, at the least, bring the parties together and it can lead to binding them together to joint decisions. It gets the substantive issues out on the table where they can be better understood

and acted upon. It allows for interaction on the problem.

Power play is the least desirable method for organizational effectiveness (although it may be the most desirable approach for an individual who has the potential for winning). Generally, aggressive and hostile feelings exist between those locked in a power struggle, shutting off communication and interaction. Vicious gossip may ensue, causing rumors and otherwise distorting information. All of this tends to drive information underground so that the organization and the parties involved cannot learn from their experience since there is little honest feedback. A large amount of sabotage and non-compliance takes place which harms the system. People acting in their own self-interest often subvert the organization.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THREE MODES

COLLABORATION:

The collaborative approach commonly used in organization development (OD), is a fairly carefully defined theory and method for managing conflict. The OM first causes each side to expose its problems and disagreements with the other side and to exchange information openly and willingly; ideally, the adversaries then interact until they arrive at mutually satisfactory and creative options which allow them to achieve workable solutions. Sometimes the process stagnates because the parties involved are too close to the issues to perceive alternate approaches, or because they may be too protective of underlying restraining forces to permit full exposure of the issues. The OM can then bring in or act as a third-party facilitator to help clarify the problem, sharpen the issues, find commonalities, use greater skill, synchronize time and space, summarize,

restructure and make the process more constructive, diagnose the restraining forces in a more objective way and, generally, give support. He is, however, merely a facilitator, and does not par in making the decision or even become too involved in the substa of the problem.[5]

The energy derived from conflict orientations and feelings viewed as creative tension which then provides excess energy for problem solving and innovative improvement. In order for constr confrontation to occur, a supportive organizational climate (e.g must exist; furthermore, the parties involved must be skillful a at problem solving activities or they must use the skills of a t party facilitator.

POWER:

Except in authoritarian situations where employers rule by command, power strategists are covert, their tactics undefined i direct contrast to collaborationists or bargainers whose openness definition of problems are the principal ingredients of resoluti People who play power games do so instinctively, using informati strategically and revealing as little as possible to the opponen Consequently, not much is known about the theoretical framework using power.[6] Obvious power tactics that could enhance the powe tactician's position in the organization are: manipulating and scarce information; systematically engaging in acts of sabotage non-compliance; forming and joining coalitions to serve a purpos becoming withdrawn or autonomous in order to resist the influenc others; creating conditions of uncertainty for others and certai

for himself; giving out and collecting on favors; co-opting; using force or threats of force. The basic idea of the power player is to act in his own self-interest, to bias other people's perceptions of his potential power and to gain favorable outcomes for himself, usually at the expense of others.

However, we know little about how these strategems are best employed, nor the consequences, the outcomes, the ground rules and the limits of the approach. Power strategies are difficult to research because they are so secretive and are observable mainly in the form of results instead of processes. What we do know is that power tactics are extremely self-interest oriented and information is used most strategically and unilaterally. Power tactics are qualitatively different from bargaining, and diametrically different from collaboration in both of these dimensions.

The Third-Party authority person (or group) plays the ultimate role. When conflict management or power-players fail to resolve conflicts in a manner satisfactory to the organization's best interests, the authority-person steps in and takes over. He is the ultimate protector of the organization's interests and as such, establishes the optimal limits of the organizational tolerance for power struggles. Rather than helping people or groups in conflict to work through their differences, the authority person dictates the solutions. Generally, his method is direct and incisive: he dismisses people from the organization, legislates new rules, restructures the hierarchy and makes judgments about the merits of the case. Finally, he elicits external commitments ("do it or else") from the parties in dispute.

BARGAINING:

As an approach to conflict management, this bargaining method contains elements analogous to both collaboration and power. It resembles the collaborative process because it is a systematic theory and method which, in some of its forms, allows for collaboration between negotiators.[7] It can certainly lead to collaboration once power parity and trust have been established. Bargaining also achieves a common solution which, while it might lack the strong internal commitment of the disputants, is at least conciliatory and congruent with some overall organizational purposes.

Commitments reached are often guaranteed by legalistic sanctions. Yet, the difference between bargained resolutions and power-won resolutions is that the legal sanctions arrived at through bargaining derive from a process whereby the disputants themselves agree to the resolutions and are irrevocably committed to them. In power play, those in conflict tend to push the rules as far as they can, their sole limit the endangerment of their jobs. They have little or no commitment to anything except their fear of losing.

The use of the third party mediator in the bargaining mode is different from his facilitator counterpart (used in the collaboration mode) because he has the power of decision. However, it must be pointed out that during arbitration of a bargaining session, the conscientious mediator will engage in the same conciliatory procedures as the facilitator, i.e. helping and encouraging the parties to arrive at mutually acceptable solutions. He will leave aside his mandatory authority and his more active initiatives until and unless the two sides prove irreconcilable.

There is a facet to bargaining that is similar to power strategies: the parties are encouraged to represent their self-interest. However, unlike those who use the power approach, the bargainers make these interests known by putting them on the bargaining agenda. Also, they are prepared to compromise these interests to improve their long-range position and for the overall good of the organization. Information is used strategically as well, but eventually is shared (although it may not always be truthful or accurate) so that there will be a basis for negotiation. The opposing parties divulge what they want and what they are prepared to relinquish in order to get it. They prioritize their demands.

In other words, in pure power-play, the end justifies the means. But this tactic in bargaining is mitigated by the fact that a long-term relationship is being developed. Thus, the parties consciously try to arrive at equitable resolutions which "down-the-line" will not engender renewed dissatisfaction and ill-will on either side. Even when they do not achieve full measure of that for which they are bargaining, the parties assume that they will meet again to negotiate further. The next time around, they are often prepared to "give" on a substantive issue in order to assure a more effective process (or a debt of reciprocity) on an ongoing basis. On the other hand, power strategists take all they can and give as little as possible at any time.

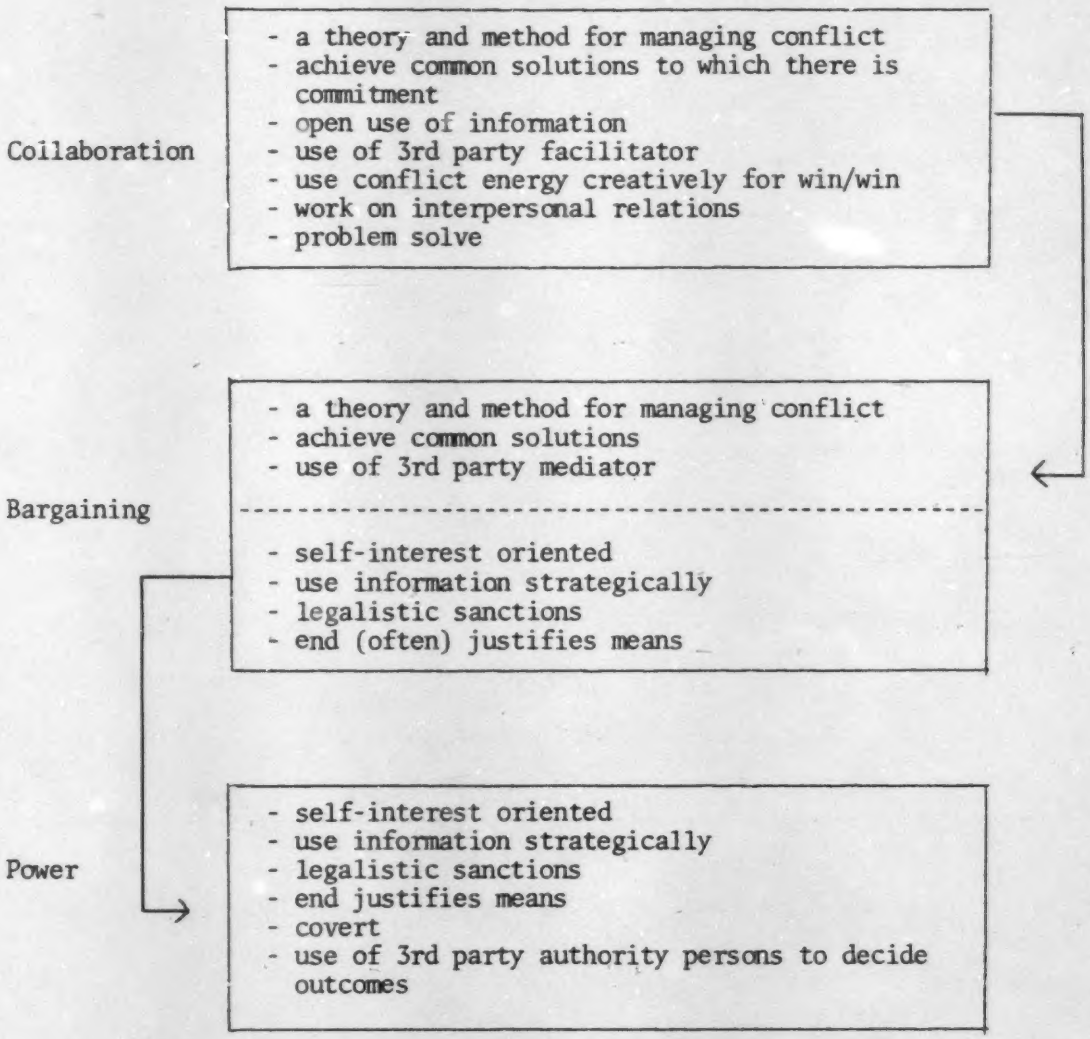
Thus, at either extreme, are the collaborative and power approaches to conflict. The gap between them is great. Collaboration is benevolent and systematic; power is survival-oriented and intuitive. Where the former is optimistic, the latter is often a reactive back-up position which has

as its purpose to coexist with conflicts rather than to attempt to manage them. Bargaining, therefore, can be viewed as a theoretical "connecting bridge" between the most salutary (collaboration) and the most destructive (power) uses of conflict-energy. Only when the power tactician's forces have been neutralized to the point of a standoff between him (it) and the opposition, can the bargaining mode be implemented effectively. This is possible because it utilizes many of the motivational factors of each of the others extreme modes. Since harmony and full cooperation between forces is generally the organization's stated objective, bargaining should be viewed and used by both parties as an introductory method by which an on-going system of collaboration is to be achieved.[8]

The first item on the bargaining agenda should be agreement to release information heretofore private to both sides. Item by item, such information is exchanged until a degree of power parity has been reached. The conflict energy thereby generated becomes the collaborative problem-solving resource of the organization.

Figure 1 on the next page illustrates the relationship between the three strategies. Note especially, the distance between power and collaboration, and the use of bargaining as a half-way strategy between the two:

FIGURE 1: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRATEGIES


Collaboration
- a theory and method for managing conflict
- achieve common solutions to which there is commitment
- open use of information
- use of 3rd party facilitator
- use conflict energy creatively for win/win
- work on interpersonal relations
- problem solve
Bargaining
- a theory and method for managing conflict
- achieve common solutions
- use of 3rd party mediator
- self-interest oriented
- use information strategically
- legalistic sanctions
- end (often) justifies means
Power
- self-interest oriented
- use information strategically
- legalistic sanctions
- end justifies means
- covert
- use of 3rd party authority persons to decide outcomes

FORMULATING A CONTINGENCY THEORY OR - WHEN TO USE WHICH...

The determination of when to use which approach - or which combination - depends on a diagnosis of the causes of the conflict and the presence or absence of certain preconditions.

DIAGNOSIS

A rule of thumb in contingency theory is that the prescription is only made after a careful diagnosis of the problem. The CM has to determine whether the causes are personal, interpersonal, intergroup, environmental, or a combination thereof.

When individual stress mounts and influences an employee's work and relationships in the enterprise, it is an organizational conflict. Regardless of the origin of these personal tensions (they may, for example, result from marital problems or psychological pathologies), the CM has only a few tools for dealing with the situation. He can engage in a one-to-one relationship with the employee and try through counseling and coaching to help manage the problem. He can recommend personal therapy and hope that the problem will thereby be resolved. He can, where possible, act on the organization in favor of the individual (e.g. help to accommodate his values, try to adjust both organization and individual expectations). He can dismiss or transfer the person.

Most personal problems are also interpersonal in complex organizations, because people must interact on the job. Even individual issues become interpersonal conflicts when an unhappy employee comes into contact with his work group. Interpersonal disputes are more easily

managed when the OM is able to act skillfully as a third party facilitator; wher the organization is willing to spend time and money to engage in team building and problem solving activities; when the various task roles are well-designed or structured; and when the parties can openly negotiate with themselves and the system for their mutual self-interests.

Intergroup disputes increase the complexity of the conflicts in the organization but are still manageable. Here the OM must develop techniques for either getting the groups openly to explore their mutual benefits and to problem-solve their differences or to negotiate a more formal contract of resolution. Another alternative is to try to design an organization where units interact as little as possible and each is able to maximize its own self-interest. For the reasons mentioned above, however, the collaborative approach is most preferred for organizational effectiveness.[9]

For some years, organizational theorists have been aware of the impact of the external environment on the organization. Indeed, human enterprises are labelled "open systems" to connote the permeability of their boundaries with events and inputs from their environment. The organizational system must carry on a responsive exchange with its external environment or it simply ceases to exist.[10]

Related to the above, a fourth category of organizational conflicts can exist between competing organizations experiencing conflicting self-interests. Sometimes these competing systems are external to the organization and sometimes they are internal subsystems acting as if they were external organizations (e.g. unions). In every case, these competing

organizations want to take from the system with which they are in conflict, economic resources, legitimate authority, popular support, the symbols of power, and other resources that are scarce and are valued by the organization.

The tools for resolving interorganizational and environmentally imposed disputes are at best primitive.[11] However, bargaining and power strategies are more likely to be effective in these situations than the collaborative approach. This is due to the lack of common authority structure, the competition for scarce resources and the difficulty associated with perceiving mutual interests (it is hard to trust a confederation of separate entities).[12]

One form of environmental pressure that has lately gained in importance and against which the OM must use his most persuasive powers and, to a lesser extent, his bargaining tactics, is the profligation of revolutionary and adversary groups. The people associated with these groups exist to scrutinize and question not only the actions of the enterprise but, sometimes, challenge its actual existence. Collaboration is not likely to be an effective strategy here because, as Oppenheimer says in discussing revolutionary movements,

> "....hence any opposition must be total opposition, prepared for prison, exile, and hopefully, ultimate revolution ... the symbol 'compromise' enjoys a bad reputation almost on a par with 'opportunism.' Compromisers are therefore perceived as betrayers. When independence or liberation is achieved, the moderates are dealt with; objectively, they had sided with the enemy."[13]

Most of these environmental forces rely on public support for their attacks against the system. Thus, the more the radical organi-

zation can do to assure its public legitimacy, the better it is for the group. Figure 2 below summarizes these systemic levels of organizational conflict.

FIGURE 2: DIAGNOSITIC CONTINGENCIES

PROBLEM	ALTERNATIVE		
	Collaboration	Bargaining	Power
Individual	counseling coaching	negotiation organizational accommodation	dismiss or transfer
Interpersonal	3rd party skill building time and support	negotiation	role design
Intergroup	collaborative	bargaining	structure for autonomy
Environment	adoption proactivity	bargaining	self-defense

PRECONDITIONS

Diagnosis of the causes of conflict is related to assessing whether or not the conditions for using any one approach do, in fact, exist. The major requisites for using the three different conflict management approaches are stated below. They are listed according to the author's interpretations of what constitutes the most to the least criterion. Thus, under Collaboration, the most important pre-

condition is required interdependence. Resolving substantive issues is the prime function of Bargaining. Power-tactics may work well when the power is in the hands of legitimate authority.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is best employed when a combination of factors exist which assures the method some reasonable degree of success. There are four major prerequisites for using collaboration. In order of importance they are: required interdependence, power parity, evident mutual interest and organizational support.

Let us examine them separately:

Required Interdependence

This refers to the requirement for persons and groups in the enterprise to collaborate in order to accomplish the task. Some attribute the source of this requirement to the external environment because the nature of the tasks depends on the product which, in turn, is dependent on both environmental inputs and environmental demands.

To surface disagreements and work them through requires a considerable commitment of time, energy and emotions. It is questionable whether people will (or should) invest themselves to manage a dispute that is not compelling. People should be required to manage their differences openly only when they cannot accomplish the work.

Power Parity

Interdependence between individual groups, departments

or factions is more than simply acting a role to accomplish a task and reach an objective. It is also having a real and equal stake in the outcome, and due to this, sense no constraints in the collaborative relationship to interact frankly, even to deal firmly with conflict when necessary. A kind of power parity must exist wherein the parties are neither dependent nor counter-dependent. Rather, they should feel free to interact and use all their resources to further the total organizational objectives. While the parties may recognize that they hold different rank in the organization, if they cannot put aside status and authority differences in order to work together for the common objective, then, by definition, there cannot be true collaboration on work.

In many instances, the power parity involved in collaborating will vary directly according to the compelling nature of the task. When the task is demanding (e.g. a short-term crisis of extremely important consequence for the organization), people will want to work voluntarily at full capacity, without being "hung up" about power relationships, for the good of the enterprise. Other times, it may be necessary to group persons at the same level of the hierarchy (peers) to get the task accomplished. Or, some of these dysfunctional vertical authority relationships may have to be resolved for productivity to exist.

Evident Mutual Interest

The person or group in conflict must experience a "felt" need that leads him/it to want to work on the disagreement. This is

related to the two requisites cited above. But in addition to a compelling organizational reason and feeling enough parity to be able to collaborate, the parties themselves must be motivated. Ther motivation often depends on whether the mutual gains are self-evident.

The common goals, positive feelings and possible benefits that could accrue from such a process need to be elaborated. A third party facilitator to the dispute, because he is not involved directly, may be able to help uncover and clarify the mutual incentives. Or, the relationship itself may have to be tested and evolve (e.g. in terms of building trust) before such open conflict management behavior is possible.

Organizational Support

When there is required interdependence, power parity and a "felt" need (evident mutual interest) provoking the will to engage in the process, then the fourth prerequisite comes into play. It is the extent to which there is organizational support for such behavior.

Unless complex organizations can actually store up some energy beyond simply existing (homeostasis), they will not be able to engage in organizational improvement programs. They will assume a management-by-crisis mode and their goal will be restricted to mere survival. There must exist other-directed excess energy to engage in conflict management programs.

If, however, the organization can be made to recognize that its long-term survival depends on planning changes for improvements, it will realize the importance of giving support to such efforts. One

way to prevent crisis-management is to defuse the incipient crises by working them through while they are still conflicts. Moreover, using the energy of a conflict to arrive at a creative solution to the problem will promote innovation and generate ingenious alternatives to organizational dilemmas. Further, when felt tensions are made public, information leading to bigger organizational problems may be recognized. This feedback may lead to modification and improved performance which, in turn, could lead to extra survival capital.

Using the collaborative strategy, considerable organizational resources are needed to manage conflict effectively. Such a program usually requires a commitment of time, money and energy. The organization (including top executives) should engage in a collaborative mode, system-wide, so that the norms, rewards and punishments of the enterprise will be changed to encourage such behavior. However, since most people are unaccustomed to open disagreement, particularly with someone of higher organization rank, assurance must be given that such behavior will not draw reprisals.

To confront one another effectively, and to emerge with the problem resolved also requires skills. Learning how to communicate effectively, how to synchronize the process, when and how to use a third party, how to engage in effective problem-solving, and how to keep the tension level moderate for optimal results, requires skills that can be taught. At the moment, many organizations undoubtedly view such constructive openness as deviant. However, once they are convinced of the long-term benefits to be gained through the inclusion of conflict management programs, they should not hesitate to invest

the time, money and energy to train and build the skills into t organization that would manage conflicts through collaboration.

BARGAINING

Bargaining is a strategy that requires working together to solve disputes. It is best used when the aforementioned requis necessary for collaboration are not present. It must be recogni that a bargaining or compromising approach has significant disa It may result in leaving neither party fulfilled. Half-a-loaf i better than none, but not when the bargaining tactics are used t to take advantage of the other side: using given information fo strategic counter-purposes rather than productive ones; withhold information; bluffing and threatening; insisting upon strict adh to the terms and conditions of existing oral or written agreemen although they might be counter-productive to the organization; a the imposition of sanctions for violations of same. Bargains ar at under such conditions establish a wary and resentful climate when the quasi-agreement is signed and operative, can sharpen in personal feuds, which in turn can spread into an all-out power s between the factions. Inevitably, such a quasi-agreement must p dysfunctional for solving emerging problems; and outside the fra of the bargained agreement it must foster growing attitudes of m and deletorious stratagems.

Another disadvantage is that the terms and conditions of le solutions (contracts) are often rigidly limited to a fixed date next round of negotiations. Thus, they generally do not provide

adaptiveness and flexibility according to environmental demands or for following opportunities for creative and proactive management. Finally, when the goal of "beating the other side" becomes more important than the organizational objective of creating a smooth running team to enhance and improve the organization's working atmosphere and modalities, the bargaining process becomes only a tool reinforcing the counter-productive erosive process of the power struggle.

However, in a deadlock or revolt situation, where the organization's productivity is affected and its survival threatened, the power player, who has overplayed his hand, has two options: chancing imminent total take-over by a third party authoritarian, in which event he risks losing all power and possibly his job; or, opting to submit the issues to bargaining. Bargaining is only meaningful to the organization, however, when the issues are limited to the substantive so that agreements can be reached that result in power parity. Once this balance is attained, the stage is set for dynamic conflict management which can then move the parties strategically toward a collaborative mode.

Substantive Issues

No matter how good the conflict management procedure is or how much the parties want to collaborate, they may remain in dispute over some issue, such as salaries, or which method is best to accomplish an objective, even over a philosophic difference. Oftimes these issues lay outside the control of either party and are simply due to some environmental condition: a recession, for example, leads to times of scarcity and salaries must be held at a certain level or cut back; a

work procedure or a safety measure about which both sides feel strongly but about which each must respect the other side's position. In such a case, they agree to disagree because in good conscience they cannot abandon their own arguments and they concur at least to search for and be receptive to some way to resolve the problem that will be mutually acceptable.

It should be possible to problem-solve most organizational conflicts by attempting to find creative new alternatives that will help both parties. However, this is not always successful, even when there are good intentions on both sides. Bargaining is a method designed to help resolve substantive issues. A "breakthrough" is encouraged, by compromising, when the parties in dispute are bogged down. Bargaining forces a solution through binding arbitration (albeit a decision) that may not be entirely satisfactory to either party). The emphasis in bargaining is to solve the substantive problem. All other considerations such as being conscious of the relationship, the procedure, the climate and other related dimensions to the problem that may distract from the substantive issue must be set aside.

Gaining Power Parity

Sometimes the required interdependence between individuals or factions is not great enough to make collaboration compelling or advisable. The climate, hierarchical relationships and norms of the enterprise may not support confrontive, problem-solving behavior: a person who confronts his boss with a valid criticism may be punished

later; a person exposing his differences to the opposition could divulge information that would later be used against him. An intelligent approach for the individual(s) who does not feel enough equality or leverage in the relationship would be to test his influence with minor suggestions; if he sees they are accepted graciously, it would indicate the other(s) is ready to work together effectively and without reprisals.

Bargaining, as indicated, is a method for winning power parity. Just getting into trading position assumes some equality, as each side recognizes that the other has something of value to offer and/or withhold that which is needed or can be used by the other. The actual act of trading and compromising highlights the felt or assumed strength and the influence of each party within the organization. In this process, the power position of each side is clearly defined in direct ratio to the information it reveals to the other, the concessions it makes, the punishment or penalties it can impose.

Lack of Organizational Support

Bargaining does not require highly developed conflict management machinery to function. That is, the organization does not have to build the infrastructure of a supportive climate, skill building, norms of openness and confrontation and interpersonal trust that are essential to make the collaborative approach successful. Such machinery usually develops later when the bargaining process stabilizes through achievement of power parity. However, for one group to organize and marshall its grievances in order to make demands of another and then force

interaction to come to a decision, is straight-forward and easily begun if the grievances are backed by any degree of power. Therefore, when the conflict management machinery is not well-developed but some coalition is possible around issues to gain power parity, the Bargaining mode is most useful.

Moving Towards Collaboration

It must be reiterated that Bargaining is a bridge between the Power mode and the Collaborative mode. It is a lever by which to move a system towards Collaboration. Ironically, in the event that a majority (or the power faction) of the system's membership is reluctant to accept the importance of collaborative problem-solving (such as the granting of power parity relationships, fostering new norms, etc.), a meaningful threat by the anti-power faction to unleash all of its own power arsenal in a win-lose struggle often turns the situation around, cementing once and for all a power parity relationship between the factions. Once a bargaining mode has been established and power parity therefrom has gained equal recognition of rights, needs and the "good faith" and trust potential of the opposing factions, and these, as well as the interpersonal dynamics, have been tested and proven, the conflict management machinery can be fully implemented.

In some industries and organizations where the bargaining mode is the established method for settling differences, opposing factions have been utilizing informal arbitration rather than the hard "give and take" procedures of formal bargaining sessions. The savings in time, energy, money and emotions reflected in the organization's goal achievements

results in most instances in a willingness on both sides to set up conflict management machinery to handle not only issues in conflict, but to seek out and detect sources of potential conflict which can be collaboratively problem-solved before they become dynamic issues.

Some of the older union-management relationships, such as the steel industry, for example, have established enough parity and trust so that they are using informal arbitration and pre-problem solving on a continuing basis; thus, they are evolving from a bargaining mode to the collaborative mode.

POWER

A power strategy to manage organizational conflicts depends on certain environmental, intraorganizational and personal preconditions; also whether an individual has his own or an organizational perspective. Power is basically different from the other two strategies in that a mutually acceptable solution to a problem is not the intended nor expected outcome. Rather, the power person(s) tries to exercise as much control over others (for the good of themselves or their organizational interest) as possible.

Before we list the preconditions, let us examine the three major sides to power dynamics in an organization:

Formal Authority (referred to earlier as "third-party authority"). This dimension of power is effective to the extent that it is legitimate and is believed. It backs up its authority with sanctions for non-compliance. However, scholars since Barnard have raised serious questions about the effectiveness of authority for exercising control over others.[14] Crozier also points out that it is difficult ever to

legislate behavior so closely that the individual still lacks a lot of discretion about his compliant behavior.[15]

Informal Influence is another aspect of power that may come from one's personal leadership style, one's expertise, one's ability to manipulate and persuade, or one's access to informal sources for coercion (e.g. blackmail, physical force, outside the-organization normative pressures). Not everyone in authority has influence because it is an informal source of power. However, some persons in authority are also able to use their offices and other resources to acquire influence. This makes for a powerful combination.

Autonomy is the third dimension to the power triangle ... the ability to resist formal authority and informal influence in favor of one's own self-interest. Being autonomous allows one to be his own man, to control others by exercising complete control over self.

Using a power strategy may be most appropriate when the conditions listed below are present:

Under Conditions of Legitimate Authority

When the authority of an office is accepted by the subordinates as having a right to exercise control, the mechanism may work well to mandate the management of conflict. For example, this may be a model that will work for certain religious organizations, where authority is inspired, or for the military, where those in authority have the ability to put someone in jail or to dismiss him from the organization for not following orders. Authorities who are so endowed, and especially where they also have influence, could redesign the rules for managing conflicts, could command individuals to suppress their feelings or

could coerce parties into using the collaborative format. These persons are able to design various strategies without giving as much attention to compliance.

Under Conditions of Autonomy

Perhaps just as rarely as the above but still, in some instances, a person may, in fact, be quite autonomous within the organization. Some university professors or scientists (or other professionals) may fit into this category. If few people can command or influence them with any consequence, then they may want to use their resistant powers to preserve their independence. However, if they should try to influence others also, they are bound to lose some of their autonomy because, by so doing, they extend rather than retreat.

To Cope with Crisis or Routine

Where the organizational environment is so stable as to create internal conditions of routine; then the authority structure and the procedures and norms can become rather routinized (via rules and job descriptions, for example). This can lead to excessive control: employees using power tactics to make themselves heard vis-a-vis rather "heavy handed" boses; or to subvert and manipulate undesirable practices.

Where the environment is so turbulent that it threatens the very survival of the organization, the top echelon administrators may manage by crisis. In times of crises, those in authority tend to assume emergency powers. They may react even more aggressively and oppressively towards others because they themselves are threatened. Subordinates in the organization will probably decide between giving them emergency power for the good of all concerned or using power tactics to actively resist

them. If management-by-crisis becomes a predominant style, power struggles will almost certainly be employed.

External Threats

When some external force seeks to destroy for whatever reason, it is best to combat the aggressor by using power tactics. Such organizations, as mentioned above, often lack the incentive for or are philosophically opposed to collaboration. They may bargain if there is something to exchange. In most cases, however, detente will be achieved through a balance of power strategy.

A Desire or Need to Use Power

Power is a possible alternative when it becomes clear that winning is imminent. For some, it may seem imperative to "win" on a certain issue for a number of perfectly sound reasons, some of them thought to be in the organization's long-term interest. Others just want to win for personal reasons. They say, why should a person bargain or collaborate if he is clearly in a position to get his way, unless he is convinced it is somehow more humane? The use of raw power is costly in the long-term, however, because others easily coalesce to combat it, and it may alienate important people who have been supportive. Consequently, although in the short-term it may be the best strategy, it can have a negative residual effect.

Some people have personality traits, non-organizational interests and psychological needs that are best served by a power strategy. They may crave independence, dislike interaction and fear supervision, in which case they prefer autonomy or withdrawal. They may have basic needs, derived from childhood experiences, that lead them to want to sabotage, gossip and subvert those in authority. They might have strong needs to

be "somebody" and have influence with others. Thus, they might opt for a power setting in order to be more comfortable. Some might simply be more skilled at politics and manipulation that at bargaining and collaboration, so they choose what they do best.

Ideological Orientations

The newspapers are full of accounts of government employees who leak valuable information to the press. The dimensions of the problem, along with the values of the Youth Movement, are of great concern to many top executives in regard to recruitment. Many employees are now more loyal to their own moral code than they are to the principles and objectives of the organization in case of a clash between practices and values.

Some persons working in an enterprise may become convinced that it or parts of it are corrupt or socially irresponsible. They seek to destroy it from within. Others join with outside groups in causes that are designed to overthrow the organization. Others may simply refuse to participate if they believe a course of action or policy is "wrong."

No Perceived Alternatives

When a working participant feels desperate, he may turn to power tactics for his own survival. In this situation, because he feels threatened, he is very dangerous. In many organizational settings there simply does not exist the underlying trust, sincere intent, organizational support, power parity or required interdependence to use the collaborative mode. Bargaining also is not possible because the right issue and the right conditions are not present

to permit it to take place. Thus, power is the only viable remaining alternative.

Research tells us that if a person or a group is desperate to be heard (e.g. the poor in the ghetto, some low-level participants in a bureaucracy) or are extremely threatened, they are more likely to be aggressive and hostile.[16] Where there is little to lose, people might also opt for the extreme forms of power strategy. Thus, desperation forces persons to use this mode - and often, use it destructively.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

For managers, settling disputes is central to improving their organizations. When a OM gets at the real reasons for the power dynamics in the enterprise, he can often discover some basic motivators of human behavior (e.g. self-interests). Since the power strategy, and to some extent bargaining, operate at a level of manipulating and hoarding scarce information, diagnosing the nature of certain conflicts is analogous to getting at the heart of the matter.

Unfortunately, many organization developers have pushed collaboration to such an extent as the "best approach" - even when it didn't "fit" the situation - that they have ignored the organizational realities of the worlds of power and bargaining. The Contingency Theory articulated herein takes a strong normative position, but attempts to match it to reality. It is bound to help make better diagnoses of a given situation and ultimately, be more effective. Beginning where the disputants are, the developers using the theory will find that they can really work through the conflict in a manner which is both realistic yet improvement-oriented.

For example, the author has been engaged in two conflict management efforts which illustrate this "fit." The first one was an attempt to force people in a power-oriented big city school bureaucracy to use the collaborative approach because, according to our understanding at the time, it was the "best" way to manage differences. The technology was powerful and compelling, and several people surfaced their disagreements openly in order to set the stage for problem solving. However, this open sharing of information later proved to be harmful to the participants. The readily given data were used against them.[17]

In the second instance, an attempt to help an elementary school faculty become more collaborative using a bargaining intervention proved to be succesful. Power parity was established between grade unit teams and once this was accomplished, the people involved were better able to manage their conflicts through problem solving.[18]

Organizational theorists and developers are becoming more realistic about the appropriateness of three conflict management strategies, aware that the use of each depends on the given situation. For example, the National Training Laboratories, long the proponents of collaborative values, now regularly supports laboratory education for power. All three approaches are perceived by members of the enterprise as viable alternatives for a given situation or in a particular organizational setting. The existence of the strategies should be acknowledged and they should be used appropriately and systematically.

Moreover, it is assumed that all types of organizational conflicts will occur quite naturally. Many of them will promote creative tensions that lead to system improvement. Some power strategies will serve the

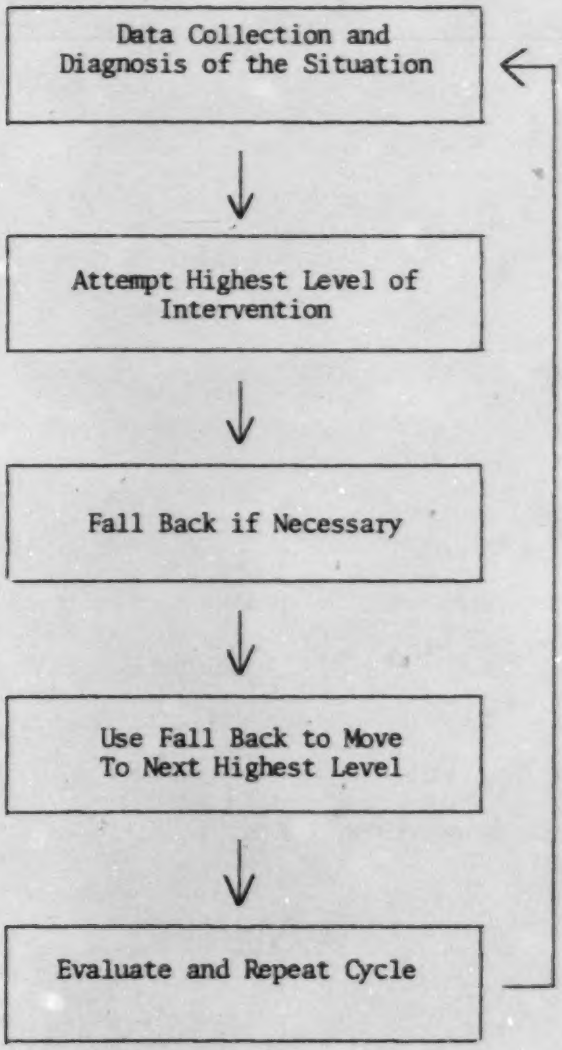
individual and possibly the organization in a variety of ways without really disrupting the organization itself. Only those disputes that are proving dysfunctional should set the machinery in motion.

The importance of an accurate diagnosis of the conflict situation cannot be overemphasized. A manager is not ready to intervene until he has discerned the nature of the dispute and the major contingencies, and he is able to formulate a Contingency Theory. A key to effect conflict management is to act appropriately (using one of the three strategies) by trying to move the conflict from where it stands to a position which is more "healthy" for the organization.

The literature is full of examples of inappropriate interventions: organization development consultants, for example, trying to move the organization to a collaborative mode without the necessary preconditions or without using bargaining as a transition step; executive who frequently advocate collaboration but do not support it, do not provide the conditions for it, and/or do not understand when and where to use it.

The following step-model might prove useful as a diagnostic procedure for conflict management to arrive at an operative Contingency Theory.

FIGURE 3: INTERVENTION MODEL


Data Collection and Diagnosis of the Situation
Attempt Highest Level of Intervention
Fall Back if Necessary
Use Fall Back to Move To Next Highest Level
Evaluate and Repeat Cycle

The conflict manager diagnoses and then attempts to use the m preferred conflict management strategy. If the necessary conditio not present in combination to assure success, he retreats in ord to build them. For example, he may lead out with a bargaining str and then be compelled to employ power tactics in order to provide preconditions for successful bargaining. During the power session he re-evaluates all of the existing conditions and then tries to m the situation to the highest, most responsive order of interventio the interest of the organization which might very well be the barg mode. In doing so, he is behaving realistically, because once he settled the existing crisis with power, he has the normative situa a guide to help manage the persons and factions toward a more coll state, that is, if he can build in the preconditions that make thi He opts for the collaborative state whenever feasible because of t greater incentive values to the individuals in their relationships each other which, in turn, creates the non-survival excess energy important to an organization's growth. Yet, collaboration may, in be very difficult to attain because of its rather demanding precon

In summary, the manager must consider collaboration, bargainin and power as strategies to be used situationally for effective con management. This empirical stance may help him to improve some of most important functions of organizational life, as well as growth the organization itself for which he becomes responsible.

FOOTNOTES

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